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# Security Council

Seventy-third year

*Provisional*

**8221**st meeting
Wednesday, 4 April 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

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| *President*: | Mr. Meza-Cuadra | (Peru) |
| *Members*: | Bolivia (Plurinational State of) | Mr. Zambrana Torrelio |
| | China | Mr. Wu Haitao |
| | Côte d'Ivoire | Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue |
| | Equatorial Guinea | Mr. Ndong Mba |
| | Ethiopia | Mr. Alemu |
| | France | Mr. Delattre |
| | Kazakhstan | Mr. Umarov |
| | Kuwait | Mr. Alotaibi |
| | Netherlands | Mr. Van Oosterom |
| | Poland | Mr. Radomski |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Nebenzia |
| | Sweden | Mr. Orrenius Skau |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Ms. Pierce |
| | United States of America | Mrs. Haley |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 March 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/283)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East**

**Letter dated 28 March 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/283)**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/283, which contains a letter dated 28 March 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I wish to encourage speakers to deliver brief statements, in accordance with note S/2017/507.

I now give the floor to Mr. Markram.

**Mr. Markram**: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. The High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, is away on official travel. I am honoured to be able to address the Council in her stead.

Before providing the Council with the latest information on the status of the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), I would first like to recall the tragic anniversary today of the use of chemical weapons — specifically the nerve agent sarin — in Khan Shaykhun. The Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) referred to this attack as an atrocity. The Secretary-General, in speaking of the same, stated that there can be no impunity for such abhorrent acts. Today seems an especially fitting date to reiterate and underscore those views, as well as to remember the victims of the attack.

As per established practice, I met with representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of these consultations. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has also continued its regular contact with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. In view of the fact that, just over two weeks ago, the Director-General briefed the Council on developments related to the OPCW's work on the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme, my own intervention today will be brief.

Efforts have continued towards the destruction of the two remaining chemical weapons production facilities by the Syrian Arab Republic. The destruction of these facilities, which will be verified by the OPCW, is expected to be completed within two to three months from the start of destruction. The long-awaited and verified destruction of these two facilities is an essential step towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

On the outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration, discussions between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic are continuing. However, these discussions have not permitted the resolution of any of those remaining issues. The OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to be unable to confirm the completeness and accuracy of Syria's declaration. The Secretary-General has repeatedly urged cooperation by the Government of Syria with the OPCW. Resolving these outstanding issues will permit shared confidence in Syria's declaration within the international community.

The OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic is continuing its work. An Mission team is currently in Damascus, looking into allegations of the use of chemical weapons that were brought to the attention of the Director-General by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I understand that the next report of the Fact-finding Mission will be submitted when it considers that it has sufficient information and is in a position to draw a conclusion.

However, and as we are all aware, conclusions of the Fact-finding Mission do not entail attribution of responsibility in those cases where the use of chemical weapons is determined. The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was created for that purpose, but regrettably its mandate was not

renewed. While allegations of the use of chemical weapons have not stopped, the consideration of a mechanism for accountability has apparently slowed, if not come to a standstill.

The persistent allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria underscore the need to identify solutions and to reach agreement on an appropriate accountability mechanism. The Secretary-General and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs have repeatedly underlined the need to avoid impunity and to ensure that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons are identified and held responsible. Let me take the Organizationpportunity to reiterate that conviction once again. Unity in the Security Council — unity of the kind that gave rise to resolution 2118 (2013), to the OPCW-United Nations joint mission and to the JIM itself — provides the best foundation for success. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Markram for his informative briefing.

I shall now give the floor to Council members who wish to make statements.

**Mrs. Haley** (United States of America): We would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the delegation of Peru on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. The United States stands ready to support you in every way possible. I thank Mr. Markram for his briefing.

We often talk about chemical weapons. However, I am concerned that we sometimes lose sight of the human side of those attacks. I want to begin by providing some insight into what such attacks are like for the people actually on the ground who experience them. We have two different accounts. This is the first account:

> "Something hit me on the head ... I was dazed, knocked down ... I got several breathes [sic] of the strong solution right from the shell ... My eyes were running water and burning, so was my nose, and I could hardly breathe. I gasped, choked and felt the extreme terror of a man who goes under in the water."

This is the second account:

> "The situation is more desperate than I can describe. There are no words. It was like Judgment Day — the apocalypse. You just cannot even describe the scene. You cannot even begin to scratch the surface of explaining what happened. We did not have any protective equipment for gas."

The first account is from the diary of an American soldier, Stull Holt. He was gassed on the First World War battlefield Verdun, France, in 1917. The second account comes from a doctor named Mamoun Morad. On 4 April 2017, he was one of the only doctors on duty in the small Syrian town of Khan Shaykhun. A hundred years had passed between what Lieutenant Holt and Dr. Morad experienced, but the horror and the terror of experiencing the use of chemical weapons are exactly the same.

Chemical weapons were first used in the First World War. However, over the decades that followed, an international consensus grew. The world saw the unique destructive power of such weapons and rightly turned away in disgust. As early as in 1925, the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare banned the use of chemical weapons in armed conflict. Decades later, the Chemical Weapons Convention banned their production, stockpiling and use. It was an unambiguous ban. We dared to believe that one day, chemical weapons would be something that we would only read about in history books. We dared to believe that we could banish the threat forever.

Then came Syria. The Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons against its own people. In 2013, the world reacted with horror at the pictures of hundreds of men, women and children dead as a result of the regime's use of sarin on the outskirts of Damascus. Although we disagreed about almost every aspect of the war, we once again found consensus on chemical weapons. Our shared disgust led us to act together. In 2013, we adopted resolution 2118 (2013), which mandated the destruction of the Al-Assad regime's arsenal of chemical weapons. In 2015, we established the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism so that we could identify anyone who used chemical weapons in Syria. The United Nations found definitively that the Al-Assad regime, as well as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, had been responsible for such use.

Once again, we dared to believe that, despite all our differences over Syria, the consensus against the use of chemical weapons by anyone would persist. Of course, we know what happened next. The Al-Assad regime continued to use chemical weapons against the

Syrian people. One member of the Council shielded the Al-Assad regime from any consequences, and then prevented us from renewing the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Our consensus broke down.

Today, the world is a far more dangerous place because of that. The Al-Assad regime continues to drop chlorine bombs on innocent men, women and children. In only the past few weeks, when the regime seized eastern Ghouta, there were credible reports of chlorine gas attacks. It is a sad fact that just a few years ago, a single chemical weapons attack would have united us in shock and anger. That would have been enough for us to take immediate action. We now have a regime that uses chemical weapons practically every second week.

Our lack of action has consequences. When we let one regime off the hook, others take notice. The use of nerve agents in Salisbury and in Kuala Lumpur is testament to that point and reveals a dangerous trend. We are rapidly sliding backwards and moving back into a world that we thought we had left. No one wants to live in a world where chemical weapons are used. No one wants to live in fear that a colourless and shapeless gas will suddenly seep into their lungs and leave them gasping for air. If we do not act and do not stop and change the course, that is the world that we could be fast approaching.

Even as the Security Council has remained deadlocked, some have stood up to demand accountability for the use of chemical weapons. The General Assembly overwhelmingly endorsed the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which is collecting evidence for future prosecutions. The United States also fully supports the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, initiated by France. Such efforts are vital.

However, we must not forget that, while we sit here debating chemical weapons, there are people on the front lines in Syria who face the terrifying reality of those heinous weapons. Dr. Mamoun Morad, whom I mentioned earlier, is among them. A year ago, he was on duty in Khan Shaykhun, where the Al-Assad regime used sarin gas in an attack that killed nearly 100 people and injured more than 500 others. Dr. Morad is a humanitarian. He saw that his countrymen were in need. He risked everything, including his own life, to help save others.

Dr. Morad is no stranger to working under the toughest circumstances. In 2015, the hospital where he worked was struck by a missile. Nevertheless, he continued to save lives. In 2016, Dr. Morad ran out through the door of a hospital hit by an airstrike only to see the building completely destroyed by another strike moments later. Nevertheless, he continued to save lives. In 2017, a missile struck the entrance of the clinic where he worked. He was hit by debris. Nevertheless, he continued to save lives. On 4 April 2017, just after leaving the town's hospital, Dr. Morad saw the warplanes over Khan Shaykhun. He did what he had always done — he told his driver to turn around and to go back. What Dr. Morad saw was a living hell — one victim of the sarin attack after another kept arriving. He recalled:

> "A boy arrived gasping for breath, with foam coming out of his mouth and with pinpoint pupils. We washed the boy. We washed and we washed and we washed. We gave him what treatment we could, and tried to resuscitate him, but he did not make it."

Even as he felt himself being contaminated by sarin, Dr. Morad did not stop. He was just one person, with almost no staff. The hospital had almost no medicine. Much of what was left had expired years ago. However, Dr. Morad did not stop. He did whatever he could to revive the unconscious and to clean off the toxic chemicals from their bodies before they died. He never ceased trying to save lives. Dr. Morad is a hero. He has made the journey to be with us today. I ask him to stand up.

We salute Dr. Morad for his bravery, courage and determination to help any Syrian who is in need. Dr. Morad is here today to be an inspiration to all of us. He works to save the lives of the Syrian people even after living through missile attacks and air strikes — even after being gassed at Khan Shaykhun. Dr. Morad does not stop; he does not give up. And if he is not going to stop, we must not stop. We must not stop working to rid this world of chemical weapons and holding to account anyone anywhere who uses them.

We have done this before. We have committed to a world without chemical weapons. We have signed the treaties banning them. We have destroyed stockpiles. We have launched truly independent and impartial investigations to know who is responsible for using

them. As Dr. Morad once said, "I do not care about politics". What he wants is for the world to speak out about the suffering of the Syrian people and for us to do our jobs and make the suffering stop. We owe him and the Syrian people that much.

On 4 April 2017, the people of Khan Shaykhun suffered an unspeakable tragedy. On this day, 4 April 2018, let us reflect on this tragedy. Let us remember what Dr. Morad witnessed, and let us use this meeting as the start of a renewed partnership and a renewed commitment to putting an end to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We have done it before. Even with all of the profound divisions on the Security Council, the United States refuses to believe that we cannot come together once again to stop chemical weapons, not just to protect the Syrian people but to protect us all.

**Mr. Van Oosterom** (Netherlands): In honour of Peru's presidency, Mr. President, let me thank you in Spanish: *Muchas gracias, Señor Presidente*. I also extend my warm thanks to the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Thomas Markram, for his briefing.

This year, we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War. The ensuing ban against the use of chemical weapons raised the hope of the world for an end to the horrors of chemical warfare. Sadly, 100 years later, chemical-weapon attacks have been taking place in Syria, reportedly at least 85 times. In that context today, I will make three points: first, Syria's failure to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention; secondly, the commemoration of the sarin attack at Khan Shaykhun; and thirdly, accountability.

As to my first point, Syria's failure to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention, this month 21 years ago, the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force. It was the first disarmament agreement to provide for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction under universally applied international control. It was a great achievement.

Almost five years ago, Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria promised to destroy and abandon its chemical weapons programme. Yet, month after month, we hear that the Syrian regime's declaration cannot be considered complete or accurate. Until that declaration is complete, Syria is simply not complying with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. We are deeply concerned — and we remain deeply concerned — about this fact, and we reiterate our call upon the Syrian regime to extend its full and timely cooperation to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

As to my second point, the commemoration of the sarin attack at Khan Shaykhun, today we commemorate the horrendous sarin attack by the regime against Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017, as Thomas Markram highlighted in his briefing. The conclusions of the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), mandated by the Security Council itself, were clear — the Al-Assad regime carried out the heinous 4 April attack, killing approximately 100 innocent Syrian civilians, including many children, and injuring hundreds more. The report also determined that Da'esh was responsible for using the chemical weapon sulfur mustard in attacks on 15 and 16 September 2016 in Um-Housh, Syria.

Sadly, that was not the last time that we received reports that chemical weapons were used in Syria. Dozens of instances are currently being investigated by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. The use of chemical weapons should never go unpunished. Impunity erodes the important prohibition of the use of chemical weapons.

That brings me to my third point: accountability. All members of the Security Council regularly stress the need for accountability for perpetrators who use chemical weapons. Yet the Security Council has not been able to move forward for months due to the use of veto by a permanent member of the Council. The Joint Investigative Mechanism had a strong mandate to investigate and identify perpetrators independently from the politics in the Council. But the renewal of the JIM's mandate fell victim to exactly those politics. That does not mean we now need to settle for less — all the more so because, since the JIM ceased to operate, we have received reports that the regime has carried out at least five more chemical-weapons attacks, and maybe even more. The disappearance of the JIM cannot be the end of the story.

First, we must act upon the conclusions of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and on the outcomes of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission. I reiterate that a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in The Hague by the Security Council is the most appropriate path to accountability and justice.

Secondly, we must intensify our efforts to achieve a mechanism that can continue the meticulous work of the JIM. Such a mechanism should, first, independently decide how it will conduct its investigations. I emphasize that it should do so independently. It should also investigate and identify perpetrators of all parties to the armed conflict. Further, it should operate independently from the Council, including when it comes to the attribution of guilt. The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that the Security Council should rally around the United States draft text for a new mechanism.

Finally, we also have to consider all instruments outside of the Council to advance accountability for the use of chemical weapons. That effort should build upon the important work of the JIM and the OPCW Fact-finding Mission. We are ready to take the lead in this regard. In this context, we also re-emphasize our strong support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and the Commission of Inquiry. We also support the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, initiated by France.

In conclusion, there is no middle ground in the Council when it comes to chemical weapons. Ultimately, we must learn the lessons of history and ensure that, 100 years after the end of the First World War, there can be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons. To do otherwise is to effectively condone these appalling attacks and to undermine the international architecture that we collectively designed to stop them. In the words of the Secretary-General, we must begin to repair the damage to the chemical weapons disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to do its utmost to achieve accountability for the horrific use of chemical weapons in Syria. Impunity cannot prevail.

**Ms. Pierce** (United Kingdom): I thank the Deputy to the High Representative for his briefing.

I would like to start by also saluting Dr. Morad. I thank him for his work, and I thank Ambassador Haley for drawing our attention to his presence in this Chamber today. I also thank all those members of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and others who try so hard to help the people of Syria.

We have heard very graphic accounts of what exactly sarin is and how it attacks the central nervous system and leads to convulsions, paralysis and asphyxiation. I am sure that none of us will forget the footage we saw of the agony of the men, women and children who were poisoned by this nerve gas. As previous speakers have said, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic concluded that sarin was used in Khan Shaykhun, and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism concluded that the Syrian regime was responsible for the attack.

Khan Shaykhun was not the first time the regime used chemical weapons. In 2013, after hundreds that were killed with sarin in eastern Ghouta, Russia and the Al-Assad regime promised the world that Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons. Resolution 2118 (2013) decided that Syria would destroy its chemical weapons programme and join the Chemical Weapons Convention. Last month, the Director-General briefed the Council on Syria's progress in doing just that. The Director-General noted that Syria had destroyed its declared programme very quickly, but that questions had arisen following inspections conducted by the OPCW, and overtime those questions have increased as inspectors have deployed to Syria more than a dozen times.

Chemicals were found that should have been declared, and yet Syria claimed not to know why. After long, drawn-out discussions, they finally declared the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre, but there were still 21 serious issues that remained unaddressed. That means that after more than four years of work, the OPCW is still unable to verify that Syria's declaration is accurate, and as we have heard many times, gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies remain in Syria's account of its declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Those are not trivial points of minor detail; they are substantive, and the seriousness of the outstanding concerns has increased over time.

My United States and Dutch colleagues have eloquently drawn attention to the fact that there can be no impunity, and we echo their call to that end. Last November, Russia blocked the renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and that leaves us, as the Dutch Ambassador said, without a proper

mechanism to determine accountability. I echo what he said about the way to explore all avenues in order to try and find a way of establishing accountability and responsibility for such weapons.

It is not just through actions in Syria, unfortunately, that Russia's disdain for the international system manifests itself. The poisoning in Salisbury of two people with a military-grade nerve agent endangered anyone who chanced to be in the vicinity. More than 130 people, including a police officer, were potentially exposed to the agent. There has been no explanation offered as to how a Russian nerve agent came to be used in that manner. On 22 March, a Foreign Ministry official in Moscow rejected the idea that Russia would accept the OPCW independent conclusions in examining material from the Salisbury attack, and today Russia has called a meeting of the Executive Council of OPCW in The Hague to pre-empt the findings of the OPCW investigation.

There should be no more victims of chemical weapons attacks, whether they take place in the war zone of Syria or in an English country town. The rules-based international order and its institutions are too valuable to be put at risk in that way. It is our collective duty to protect them and seek accountability for those who choose to defy them. We fail the people of Syria, the people of Salisbury and the world if we do not act.

Both my Dutch and American colleagues drew attention to the 100 years that have elapsed since some of the worst battles of the First World War. Allow me to conclude with a quote from a poem from that War, "I died in hell — (They called it Passchendaele)". It has a new name now.

**Mr. Umarov** (Kazakhstan): I thank the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Thomas Markram, for his informative briefing. The position of Kazakhstan on the issue remains firm and consistent. The use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable in any circumstances. Strongly condemning such actions, we firmly support the collective efforts of the Council to counteract such flagrant violations, and are determined to prevent them from happening in the future. We would like to share the following observations on the report before us (S/2018/283, annex).

First of all, we are pleased that during the reporting period there some progress was made towards the destruction of the remaining two chemical weapons production facilities. We call on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the Government of Syria and the United Nations Office for Project Services to accelerate the measures, as long as current circumstances are favourable.

At the same time, we are concerned about the lack of progress in clarifying all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic. We urge the Government of Syria and the OPCW to cooperate more closely and to maximize interaction in order to resolve all the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies. If some assistance is required from the Council, the parties should request it with practical proposals on how to intensify such cooperation. At the same time, they should outline concrete obstacles that prevent them from achieving the necessary results.

In that regard, the OPCW is supposed to provide full reports on the work of the Declaration Assessment Team. Likewise, we expect it to update us on the work of the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, especially on studying all allegations on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We note simultaneously that the Council has not yet restored its investigative potential. We hope that the two penholders will make exhaustive attempts to find common ground so as to be able to proceed further.

The last disturbing factor for us is the continued threat of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the alarming allegations. We have to prevent at all costs such destructive terrorist acts against the innocent Syrian people. Proactive steps are essential, recognizing that such acts undermine all international efforts to achieve a comprehensive solution to the military and political crisis in Syria. The Security Council remains the main organ responsible for preserving peace and security and relentlessly searching for a peaceful solution to crises and conflicts throughout the world. Unilateral military actions, beyond the legitimate decisions of the Security Council, are not an option.

It is extremely important and necessary to overcome all differences among the members of the Council that prevent the complete elimination of the threat of use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is equally vital to remove all impediments to conducting an independent and impartial investigation to identify those responsible for chemical crimes. Kazakhstan is committed to ensuring that the Council works constructively, and encourages the members to prevent the politicization

and polarization of the Council. To do so only militates against a unified response to current challenges and threats.

**Mr. Delattre** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Peruvian presidency for holding this important meeting and Mr. Thomas Markram for his very insightful briefing. I would also like to welcome Dr. Mamoun Morad to our meeting.

I shall raise three points today on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, its importance with respect to non-proliferation and our collective security, and the imperative of the fight against impunity.

The chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun that took place one year ago to the day marked a new and horrific stage in the plunge into the hell of the Syrian tragedy. On 4 April 2017, with the use of sarin gas, the Syrian regime revealed to the world its determination to crush its opponents and its people by every means possible, and to that end di not hesitate to use the most terrifying weapons of destruction.

One year later, the violence continues in Syria and the Syrian regime has not stopped using chemical weapons, which almost a century ago the international community resolved to ban forever and which the Syrian regime itself had committed not to use. Its responsibility has been established publicly and unambiguously by the mechanisms we created together to determine responsibilities. No attempt to discredit and consign to oblivion the clear conclusions reached by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) can change that reality. No one can claim that they did not know.

I would remind those who seek to refute the responsibility of the Syrian regime that it is not possible at present to confirm that Syria declared all its stocks and capacities in 2013. The ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria is an indisputable indication that stockpiles of sarin and chlorine indeed exist.

Two things are clear — either Syria lied as it assumed its obligations or it carried out a secret programme in breach of those obligations. Of course, a combination of those two theories cannot be ruled out. Therefore, we can only reiterate our call on the Syrian regime to respond to all of the many unanswered questions. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inspection teams are rigorous and professional in carrying our their mission and have been commended by all States. We take note of the information provided with regard to the upcoming destruction of Syria's last declared chemical weapons productions facilities and reiterate our full support to the OPCW.

The use of chemical weapons by anyone in any circumstances violates the universal conscience and the most basic norms of international law. Make no mistake — the use of chemical weapons poses a potentially lethal threat to the sustainability of the international chemical non-proliferation regime. That regime is one of the most developed and successful of all the international non-proliferation regimes. Allowing it to fracture without taking action would be tantamount to endorsing the decline of the entire international regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which we built together over several decades, step by step, and which is the backbone of the international security architecture and one of the key achievements of multilateralism.

Allowing those who have contributed to the re-emergence of such weapons to go unpunished breaks the taboo surrounding their use and promotes their proliferation. Regrettably, the use of a military-grade neurotoxin on British soil just a month ago confirms that our concerns are warranted. A taboo has been broken in Syria, Salisbury and elsewhere. It poses a direct threat to one of the key tenets of our collective security. It is therefore urgent that we all reaffirm and consolidate the absolute ban of such substances.

If we wish to return to a complete prohibition of chemical weapons, we cannot allow those who use them to go unpunished. If we want to reaffirm and strengthen the taboo against the use of chemical weapons, impunity cannot be a moral or political option. The use of chemical weapons against civilians is a war crime and even a crime against humanity. Those responsible must answer for their actions. The issue of determining responsibility cannot be overlooked.

Evidence has been collected, in particular by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, established by the General Assembly and tasked with facilitating investigations into the most serious crimes committed in Syria. Such evidence will be preserved and used in national and international legal

proceedings because, without justice for the victims, there will be no lasting peace in Syria. Justice must be a separate dimension in all political solutions, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). As I have already stated, although the countries in the Astana process meet in Turkey, Geneva is the only forum that can provide a lasting solution to the conflict.

There is a serious risk of undermining the non-proliferation region if we allow impunity to prevail. That is why we will continue to fully engage in all forums to combat impunity for the use of chemical weapons. It is also for that reason that in January France launched the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. This open and pragmatic partnership brings together States that reject impunity for those involved in chemical attacks or in the development of chemical programmes. It unites all States that are concerned that the non-proliferation regime and strategic stability could be undermined. It was established to support the actions of all international investigative mechanisms and forums. It is a global partnership that applies to all instances of the use of chemical weapons throughout the world and by all actors, State and non-State alike. The partnership is open and all States that abide by its principles are invited to join.

Now that the taboo against the use of such weapons has been broken, there is the risk of such weapons falling into the hands of other actors, in particular non-State actors. I recall that the JIM concluded that mustard gas was used twice by Da'esh. States that refused to punish the perpetrators identified by the JIM or to extend its mandate also squandered an opportunity to send a clear message to terrorists. It is up to all States to protect themselves against terrorist groups and their possible access to weapons of mass destruction.

The issue surrounding the use of chemical weapons affects our core values and security. If there is one area in which the members of the Security Council have the moral and political responsibility to work together and take action, it is this. If there is one area in which the credibility of the Council is at stake and where tactics and games have no place, it is this.

This year, as we commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War, in which the use of gas in combat had devastating effects, and remember the tragedy of Khan Shaykun, on behalf of France I make an urgent request that we set aside our political differences and end the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We owe it to the civilians who are the primary victims of such weapons. We also owe it to the future of the international non-proliferation regime for chemical weapons, which is one of the keystones of our collective security.

**Mr. Alotaibi** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting and wish you every success in steering the work of the Security Council this month.

We also thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing today.

We are meeting to discuss the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, on which all members of the Council firmly agree within the context of the Syrian crisis. Based on this consensus, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was established to hold accountable the perpetrators of crimes committed with chemical weapons in Syria. The Mechanism was able to determine those responsible for several crimes, including the incident that took place in Khan Shaykhun, whose first anniversary we mark today. Since then, we in the State of Kuwait have demanded an independent and impartial international investigation into the incident. The JIM determined the perpetrators of that and other painful incidents. Nonetheless, the Council was unable to hold any party accountable. Therefore, the justice we hoped for dissipated as a result of divisions among the member States, which prevented the extension of the JIM's mandate.

The State of Kuwait fully supports the work of the United Nations and of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) through its Fact-finding Mission investigating allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We commend the Mission's performance and professionalism and call on the Syrian authorities to cooperate with the OPCW in order to resolve the discrepancies concerning the details of their chemical programme. The provisions of resolution 2118 (2013) are conclusive and decisive regarding the accountability of those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

We cannot accept the current situation, namely, the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria more than four years after the adoption of that resolution. This

means that we have failed the Syrian people, and could not end their suffering from the use of these weapons against them in various Syrian areas. On more than one occasion we have expressed our full backing for any accountability alternatives and mechanisms that would enjoy the consensus of all members of the Council in a manner that would ensure its independence, neutrality and professionalism, while stressing that its responsibility is exclusively to determine who is responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Security Council would then call to account the perpetrators responsible for committing those crimes, according to the principle of no impunity provided for in resolution 2118 (2013).

We believe that those elements exist in the United States draft resolution being discussed by the members of the Council. We call on all Member States to build upon this draft resolution as a good basis for any negotiations on such a mechanism in the future. Kuwait also supports the French Partnership Initiative and the principles set out therein aimed at holding accountable those responsible for the use of chemical weapons and ensuring that there is no impunity.

We reiterate our full readiness to participate in any effort to achieve consensus in the positions of Security Council Member States so as to ensure that the perpetrators of such internationally prohibited crimes are held accountable and that the non-proliferation regime is preserved. This is based on our principled and firm commitment condemning any use of chemical weapons as a gross violation of international law, while stressing the importance of bringing to international justice the perpetrators of such crimes, whatever they may represent.

In conclusion, we welcome the efforts of the General Assembly and support the work of the impartial and independent International Mechanism in assisting the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria since 2011, including crimes related to the use of chemical weapons. We look forward to the results of its first report in this regard, which will be discussed on 17 April in the General Assembly.

**Mr. Alemu** (Ethiopia): We thank Deputy High Representative Thomas Markram for his briefing. As he noted, it has been a year since the chemical attack in Khan Shaykun claimed the lives of innocent civilians in Syria. We reiterate our strong condemnation of this inhumane attack. I thought that I should tell the Deputy High Representative that the way in which he concluded his statement was very, very appropriate. He is right in stressing how critical the unity of the Council on this matter is and that it is the key to everything.

One year after the barbaric attack in Khan Shaykun, the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria continues unabated, hence this matter remains a source of great concern. We still believe that those responsible for the use of chemicals as weapons must be held accountable based on robust evidence. This requires, as the Secretary-General mentioned in his letter dated 28 March 2018 (S/2018/283), a unified response from the Council. We believe that without unity, the damage to the chemical-weapons disarmament and non-proliferation regime cannot be repaired.

We find it very encouraging indeed that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has continued to make all the arrangements required to support the Syrian Government in destroying the two remaining above-ground facilities, including by agreeing additional amendments to the tripartite agreement concluded among the OPCW, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Syrian Government. We hope that all these preparations will lead to the elimination of the two remaining facilities.

Regarding the outstanding issues related to the initial declaration, we note that the OPCW remains unable to state that the declaration is accurate and complete. In this connection, we reiterate the importance of continued and more fruitful communication between the OPCW and the Syrian Government, with the ultimate objective of addressing the remaining gaps and inconsistencies. We see no reason why this could not be expedited.

We also note that the Fact-finding Mission has continued its investigation into allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, including by deploying a team in Syria, as mentioned by the Deputy High Representative. It is imperative that the mission's investigation into all allegations continue, including recent reports of the use of chemicals as weapons. However, the Council must address the current institutional gap by creating an independent, impartial and professional investigative mechanism that could identify the actors responsible, both State and non-State. We have no doubt that the issue of an accountability mechanism should be given extremely high priority.

This, as we have said repeatedly, would require unity on the part of the Council. Hence we join in the call made by the Deputy High Representative that the unity of the Council should be restored on this important matter so as to deter and stop the use of chemical weapons in Syria and beyond.

We indeed would recall, as others have already mentioned, that the Council had successfully summoned its collective will in the past to achieve unity with a view to addressing the challenges posed by chemical weapons. There is no reason why this feat cannot be repeated.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Peru for having convened this open meeting and Deputy High Representative Thomas Markram for his briefing.

Since the chemical-weapons attack incident in Syria, China has been deeply concerned, as we strongly condemn any attack against civilians. China's position on the issue of chemical weapons has been consistent: we firmly oppose the use by any country, organization or individual of chemical weapons, under any circumstances.

China supports the carrying out of a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation into the use of chemical weapons on Syrian territory so as to achieve a result that can pass the litmus test of history and truth, bringing the perpetrators and the parties responsible for the use of chemical weapons to justice.

China is deeply concerned about the recent incidents involving the suspected use of toxic chemicals as weapons. The establishment of a new investigation into the use of chemical weapons in Syria aimed at determining the truth, in a bid to prevent the recurrence of the use of chemical weapons on Syrian territory, is of vital importance; this is also the consensus of all parties in the Security Council. We appreciate Russia's active efforts to promote the establishment of a new investigative mechanism and hope that the members of the Council will be united and continue their constructive consultations on this issue.

All parties concerned should continue to insist that the Security Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) be the main channels for dealing with the Syrian chemical-weapon issue in an effort to seek proper solutions through consultations. China welcomes the positive progress made in the OPCW's efforts to destroy the remaining two chemical-weapon facilities in Syria and hopes that the parties concerned will cooperate closely and complete related work as soon as possible. At the same time, China hopes that the Syrian Government will duly continue to maintain its cooperation with the OPCW in order to resolve all relevant issues regard to its initial declaration on its chemical-weapons programme.

The Syrian conflict has entered its eighth year and led to profound suffering for the Syrian people. A political settlement is the only solution to the Syrian issue. The international community should increase its support for United Nations mediation efforts and the work of Special Envoy De Mistura in order to begin the next round of Geneva peace talks as soon as possible and to move forward constructively. China welcomes the summit meeting held by Russia, Turkey and Iran, which China hopes will contribute to advancing the process leading to peace talks in Geneva.

**Mr. Zambrana Torrelio** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we express our gratitude for the briefing by Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Thomas Markram, and to the presidency of Peru for convening this meeting.

We underscore the Syrian Government's cooperation in initiating the last phase of destroying the remaining facilities declared by Syria and verified by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). In that regard, we highlight the most recent meeting held in Beirut this past March, which consisted of representatives of the United Nations Office for Project Services, the OPCW and the Syrian Government, the outcome of which made it possible to agree on new amendments to the tripartite agreement that would facilitate the destruction of the those facilities, which would take two to three months.

We call on the Syrian authorities to continue and expand upon that cooperation by providing the clarifications requested by the Declaration Assessment Team in connection with activities carried out by their Government and the Scientific Studies and Research Centre. We highlight the fact that the second round of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities, as well as visits others, this past February has shown that their activities were consistent with obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

On the other hand, we reiterate our concern about recent reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons

in Syria. As it has always stated, Bolivia categorically condemns the use of chemical weapons and the use of chemical components as weapons, while considering such use an unjustifiable and criminal act, wherever, whenever and by whomever it is committed. We believe that nothing can justify their use regardless of circumstances and those who use them, as they constitute a grave violation of international law and a threat to international peace and security.

In that regard, we reiterate our firm support for the OPCW and its Fact-finding Mission so that, in line with their mandates, they can continue their investigative work and verify the alleged use of chemical weapons in the most objective, methodical and technical manner possible. We call on all parties to lend their full cooperation so that an effective, transparent and conclusive investigation can be carried out as soon as possible. We must be aware, however, that an investigation of the facts alone is not enough. It is crucial to be able to depend upon a mechanism that enables perpetrators to be identified so that they can then be brought to justice before the appropriate entities.

If it is our goal to establish a new transparent mechanism that enables investigating and identifying the perpetrators of such atrocities, then we confront the challenge and shoulder the responsibility of not politicizing or instrumentalizing the Security Council. We reiterate the need and the utmost importance of demonstrating the Security Council's unified stance on this issue to the international community, and call on the parties involved to discuss and exchange views on the establishment of an independent, impartial and representative mechanism that will allow for a complete, reliable and conclusive investigation.

Bolivia categorically rejects the unilateral imposition of sanctions, as they represent a grave threat to the international order and run contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, thereby jeopardizing the political process and, consequently, peacebuilding in Syria.

Lastly, we emphasize that the only way to settle the conflict is through an inclusive political process, deliberated and led by and for the Syrian people.

**Mr. Orrenius Skau** (Sweden): Let me thank Mr. Markram for his briefing this morning.

As other speakers before me have pointed out, today marks the one-year anniversary of the sarin attack in Khan Shaykhun, which the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism has attributed to the Syrian regime. That was a repugnant attac, with a large number of civilian casualties. Today, the failure to agree on a new independent and impartial attributive mechanism for chemical-weapons use in Syria casts a particularly dark shadow over the Security Council.

Sweden condemns in the strongest terms the continued and repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria, which constitutes a serious violation of international law and a threat to international peace and security. The use of chemical weapons in armed conflict is prohibited and is a war crime. The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable. Impunity cannot be accepted.

With regard to the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), I reiterate our deep concern that the OPCW is still unable to confirm whether Syria's initial declaration on its chemical-weapons programme is accurate and complete. A number of serious outstanding issues remain. As a matter of fact, the Director-General of the OPCW reported last month that the initial five outstanding questions currently stand at 22. That includes the case of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre, regarding which several questions remain unanswered. We once again call upon the Syrian authorities to fully and proactively cooperate with the OPCW on all outstanding issues. There must be full disclosure and submission of all required documentation without delay.

We share the Secretary-General's alarm about persistent reports of the use of chemical weapons in the conflict in Syria. Those must be followed up by timely and impartial investigations, and we reiterate our full support for the OPCW Fact-finding Mission. But the perpetrators of such attacks must also be identified and held to account. We deeply regret that the Council failed to agree on an extension of the Joint Investigative Mechanism last November (see S/PV.8105). An attributive mechanism is essential to protecting the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime and to ensuring accountability for the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria. In that regard, I join the representatives of France, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan, among others, in their urgent call for unity. We need to come together in the Council and shoulder our responsibility. We reiterate our call for constructive

engagement by all members, and we remain ready to engage in and contribute to such consultations.

Sweden supports all international efforts to combat the use and proliferation of chemical weapons — by State and non-State actors alike — anywhere in the world. We will continue to do our part to end impunity for the use of chemical weapons. That is why Sweden joined the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons — an initiative taken by France designed to complement and support our collective work in multilateral forums, as well as existing multilateral mechanisms. That is why we will continue to support the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. And that is why we will continue to pursue efforts to establish a new independent and impartial attributive mechanism for chemical-weapons use in Syria, because, at the end of the day, there can be no sustainable or long-term peace in Syria without accountability for the crimes committed. We owe that to the victims of Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere in Syria.

**Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his useful briefing on the most recent developments on the topic under consideration this morning.

My statement will focus on two points, namely, the elimination of the Syrian chemical-weapons programme and the challenges ahead.

The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire notes the destruction of all Syrian chemical weapons removed from Syrian territory by States parties to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as well as 25 of the 27 chemical-weapons production facilities declared by the Government of that country. The cooperation efforts between the Syrian Government, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services, which led to the amendment in Beirut of the tripartite agreement on the destruction of the remaining chemical-weapons production facilites, are to be applauded and encouraged. Such cooperation, which is also reflected in the preparation and regular submission of Syria's monthly reports to the OPCW Executive Council, offers hope for the actual destruction of chemical weapons.

In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire is pleased to have signed, in Paris on 23 January, the declaration of principles issued by the meeting held at the initiative of France on the topic of combating impunity through the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. While it does not replace the long-standing instruments for combating the use of chemical weapons, such an initiative helps to strengthen the existing mechanism. In that context, my delegation would like to thank all States that have contributed to the Trust Fund for Syria Missions, established in November 2015 to support the OPCW and the Fact-finding Mission.

It should be noted that, despite the encouraging progress, major challenges remain. My delegation therefore urges the Syrian authorities to continue their cooperation with the OPCW with a view to an adequate response to outstanding issues, in particular the complete destruction of the remaining chemical-weapons production facilities, the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding its chemical weapons arsenal, and the activities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre.

Côte d'Ivoire believes that any use of chemical weapons is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the hard-won international standard that prohibits those weapons. It therefore encourages the OPCW, the Fact-finding Mission and the Syrian Arab Republic to continue their cooperation on eliminating chemical weapons in Syria.

My delegation reiterates its call for a political settlement of the Syrian conflict. We call on the Syrian parties to resume peace talks as part of an inclusive political dialogue, as provided for by resolution 2254 (2015), which sets out a road map for a political process to end the crisis in Syria.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire urges the Council to restore its unity, without which it cannot take positive action with a view to establishing a consensus-based mechanism tasked with attributing responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and thereby to end their use in any conflict once and for all.

**Mr. Radomski** (Poland): Allow me to thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his

briefing and for conveying to us the fifty-fourth monthly report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (S/2018/283, annex).

Two weeks ago, we took the opportunity of Mr. Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), being in New York to thank him for the dedicated and tireless efforts of the OPCW to strengthen and to maintain the chemical non-proliferation and disarmament regime. Allow me also to stress that Poland highly values the efforts of the Fact-finding Mission with regard to all its allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

We note with the utmost concern that the OPCW Technical Secretariat remains unable to confirm that the declaration submitted by Syria could be considered as accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemcial Weapons Convention and the decisions of the OPCW Executive Council. Once again, we join the Secretary-General in calling on Syria to extend its fullest cooperation to the Declaration Assessment Team in order to clarify all existing gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies.

Today we observe the first anniversary of the deadly chemical attack on Khan Shaykun, which left dozens of victims dead or wounded. As the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism concluded in its report of 26 October 2017 (see S/2017/904, annex), the information gathered was sufficient to claim that the Syrian Arab Republic was responsible for the release of sarin at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017.

However, the individuals and groups responsible for that and other attacks have not been brought to justice, and the use of chemical weapons has become an almost regular practice in the war being waged in Syria. That is why we must send a clear message that the use of chemical weapons by anyone will not be tolerated. It is yet another reason that we need to ensure that the international community is empowered to address each and every chemical attack and to hold the perpetrators accountable. We call on our partners to engage in a constructive discussion in order to establish an independent, credible and professional investigative mechanism to replace the former Joint Investigative Mechanism. We believe that the draft resolution of the United States is a good basis for further discussion in that regard.

Putting an end to such impunity is a matter not only of justice but also of the credibility of the non-proliferation system and of the security of all of us. Only a month ago, we witnessed another example of the unprecedented use of a chemical agent in Salisbury in the United Kingdom. We hope that the responsibility for that attempt will be established quickly and that the perpetrators of that reckless act will be held accountable as soon as possible.

**Mr. Ndong Mba** (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea appreciates the convening of this meeting. We would like to reiterate our gratitude and appreciation to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, represented here today by Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. Unsurprisingly, he has provided us a grim picture of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

In 2013, in this very Chamber the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2118 (2013), which urges the warring parties in Syria to destroy all chemical-weapons stockpiles in the country. Almost five years have passed, and the debate around this issue is still as old as the conflict itself, which has been going on for eight years.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea, a State party to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and, like all the members of the Security Council, a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention, urges the parties involved to be honest in declaring their chemical arsenals. We understand that in the context of prolonged confrontations, the manufacture and use of chemical weapons end up serving a tactical objective, a plan of provocations in which each party's aim is to blame the others. Thus the Syrian opposition and the Islamist groups claim that the Syrian Government is trying to use poisonous gases to suffocate the last rebel bastions, while the Government forces claim that their opponents still have small chemical-weapon workshops that they are using to prepare chemical attacks in the regions we have discussed in order to blame the Government.

The Security Council must put an end to this political game. The use of chemical weapons in Syria clearly poses a threat to international peace and security. We must therefore prevent chemical war in Syria from changing the way we approach conflicts in future. What should the Security Council's coordinated

response to the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria be? The confrontational positions among Council members with the capacity to influence the parties to the conflict show that ending the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the world as a whole depends on reaching an inclusive political agreement. Without a clear international consensus, we run the risk of extending the conflict, with all its direct and collateral consequences.

We know that the Council no longer has an investigative mechanism that can hold violators of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Syria accountable. Nonetheless, my Government continues to insist on the urgent need for the most influential organ of the United Nations to speed up the implementation of a truly independent, professional and impartial investigative instrument. That is the only way to reunite the Council on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria. It is a challenge that goes far beyond Syria. It is about our collective responsibility and moral obligation to the victims of this long conflict.

I would like to conclude by calling on the members of the Security Council to reflect on Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations, which reminds us that one of the powers of the Security Council is

> "to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources",

and on the words of Secretary-General António Guterres in Geneva on 24 October 2017, when he said,

> "Disarmament can play an important role in ending existing conflicts and preventing the outbreak of new strife. Disarmament and arms control processes provide the breathing space for confidence to be built [and] stability to be strengthened.... This was true during the Cold War and it is true now."

With that, I would like to end by solemnly reaffirming the official position of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, which is to condemn and reject the manufacture, stockpiling, use, distribution and improvement of chemical weapons and other related weapons, whose use can cause only desolation in human lives, and to advocate for their total elimination. We saw the consequences of that use a year ago in Khan Shaykhun, and we therefore take this opportunity to reiterate our unreserved condemnation of that attack.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Since I have not personally had the opportunity to do so yet, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Security Council and to wish you every success with it. We also thank Mr. Markram for his briefing.

In view of the fact that an act of provocation involving the use of a chemical-warfare agent took place in Khan Shaykhun, Syria, on 4 April 2017, exactly one year ago, we believe it will be helpful to analyse the incident and its consequences, including in terms of global and regional security, from the vantage point of today. A year has gone by and yet the circumstances around the chemical incident in Khan Shaykhun remain essentially obscure. Needless to say, the quote-unquote work done by the defunct Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) cannot be taken seriously by professionals. The competent Russian authorities have clearly shown that the Mechanism's conclusions were nothing but an arrangement designed to fit a pre-programmed result — blaming the Syrian authorities. The Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the JIM have demonstrated a rare degree of inertia and incapacity and have been participants in unscrupulous acts of fraud. Basically, the JIM's conclusions were contrary to the laws of physics, the chemistry of toxins, aviation, ballistics and explosive materials.

During the investigation, the standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention were completely ignored. The experts did not visit the place where the incident occurred or comply with the chain-of-custody principle for preserving the physical evidence. They formulated their hypothesis based on information that militias from armed groups had eagerly palmed off on them with the help of outside sponsors and dubious entities linked to terrorists, such as the White Helmets. As I said, the results of the former JIM's investigation have nothing in common with a serious scientific and technical analysis.

Because of this, Russia was unable to support the extension of the mandate of the unchanged Mechanism, especially since its unfounded, politicized conclusions damaged the reputation of a genuine international investigation. Nonetheless, knowing that armed groups in the region, including some affiliated with terrorists, have amassed a considerable toxic-chemical capacity, not only did we not dispute the importance

of designating an independent investigative body, we have proposed a specific alternative to the JIM and circulated a draft resolution to that effect, currently in blue, to Security Council members. We have clearly outlined the main points of our position in the light of the lamentable experience with the JIM. The Secretary-General would select a professional and impartial team for the proposed mechanism on a basis of the broadest possible geographic representation, with the Security Council's approval. The basic procedure would involve visiting the areas where the incidents took place to take samples and interview witnesses, while strictly complying with the chain-of-custody principle in ensuring the preservation of the material evidence.

Based on the critical and objective evidence collected by such a mechanism, the Security Council would be able to attribute responsibility for any incident involving the use of toxic substances. In coordination with the Committees established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) and to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), it would still be important to analyse any information about chemical production by non-State actors and their use in practice of toxic substances, including for purposes of provocation. The authorities in Damascus have repeatedly reported stagings of incidents using professional video equipment and extras provided by the White Helmets. However, that information has either been deliberately ignored or considered a low priority.

In order to avoid structural flaws and continued confrontations regarding the findings of an eventual investigative body, we suggest that its leadership be composed of experts representing the five permanent members of the Security Council, who would make decisions by consensus. We believe that approach would offend no one, since it was precisely owing to disagreements among those countries that the fundamental problems in assessing the situation regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria arose.

Nevertheless, our Western colleagues are insisting on recreating a mechanism that suits them, with its inherent defects, and which would rubber-stamp the decisions they need. At the same time, they are trying to bring in bodies that in principle have neither the mandate nor the resources for investigating possible chemical incidents. Bypassing the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, France and its allies are forging a narrow group of similarly anti-Damascus-minded people, simultaneously undermining the international architecture for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the authority and integrity of the OPCW. All of that is accompanied by harsh pressure on other States.

We have not forgotten another memorable date. All things being equal, ideally, it should have been the day we held today's meeting. On 7 April 2017, three days after the incident in Khan Shaykhun, before the investigation had even begun, the United States carried out an act of military aggression against Syria, launching missile strikes at the Al-Shayrat airbase. The delegations that were on the Security Council at the time must remember how our American colleagues were expressing their willingness to find mutually acceptable solutions for the modalities of the investigation while the missiles were already flying towards Syria, in a clear demonstration that some capitals have no need of an international investigation in a situation where the goal continues to be getting rid of the legitimate Syrian Government. International law is getting close to collapse when suspicions rather than confirmed facts rule the evidence.

Nor do they want any investigations or mechanisms now, it seems. A number of countries continue to make confident claims about Damascus's use of chemical weapons, despite the obvious absurdity of such statements and the absence of evidence and, most importantly, any military or political reasons for such actions by the Syrian authorities. Russia condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone and supports the Secretary-General's calls for unity in countering this threat — but only the real one, not the imaginary. While some of them are chasing Damascus's phantom chemical weapons, the potential danger of chemical terrorism in the region continues to grow.

Guided by the common principle that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, is impermissible and should be investigated and punished, that impunity is unacceptable and that the use of such weapons constitutes a threat to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, my Government has instructed me to ask you, Mr. President, to convene an open meeting of the Security Council tomorrow afternoon at 3 p.m., concerning the letter (S/2018/218, annex) from Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom about the Salisbury incident. The corresponding letter will be sent to you shortly.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We would like to thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing. Peru notes with alarm the repeated reports of the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population in Syria and the absence of a commitment to accountability. Those are heinous crimes, committed in open defiance of the non-proliferation regime and a serious threat to international peace and security, which the Council cannot allow.

In our view, the destruction of the last two declared chemical-weapons production facilities in Syria is an important step. We welcome the meeting held in Beirut by representatives of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Syrian Government, which will contribute to that end. However, we are concerned to see, once again, the continuing discrepancies in the Syrian Government's declaration, more than four years after its accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We must urge the Syrian authorities to provide all the information required, without further delay.

We would also like to reiterate our support for the professional and objective work of the OPCW Fact-finding Mission and pay tribute to its staff. We stress that its work must be complemented by an independent mechanism that, within the framework of due process, allows for the attribution of responsibilities in this case, in line with international law and international humanitarian law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I would like to remind all speakers to keep their statements within the time limits provided for in the note by the President of Security Council (S/2017/507).

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Syria has fulfilled its commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Syria has always cooperated fully and objectively, as well as in a positive, transparent and flexible manner, in the fulfilment of its commitments, despite great challenges and the complicated, difficult and provocative security situation resulting from the hostile conduct of some regional and international parties. The Syrian Government has realized an unprecedented achievement in the history of the Organization by eliminating forever the Syrian chemical-weapons programme in record time. The elimination was confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Mission in its report (see S/2014/444) submitted to the Council in June 2014.

However, unfortunately, instead of commending the efforts of the Syrian Government, some members of the Council — and I mean the United States, which has not destroyed its huge chemical arsenal and makes one excuse after another to avoid doing so, in addition to the United Kingdom and France — have mastered the art of deception and misinformation in order to dominate the world and return to the time of colonization and trusteeship.

Those States continue to exploit the Council to make false and baseless accusations against the Syrian Government. Furthermore, they are inventing new meeting formats at the Council, with the aim of achieving one clear goal, namely, to obstruct any progress by the Syrian army against the terrorist groups supported by those same States. They aim to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government and blackmail it politically. The best proof of what I say is the theatrics staged by the White Helmets, the propaganda wing of the Al-Nusra Front. They claimed that toxic chemicals were used in eastern Ghouta. Such claims have coincided with the successful liberation of that area from armed terrorist groups by the Syrian army and its allies, and were proved to be false.

In a dangerous precedent being set, we have heard statements by high-ranking officials of the States I mentioned, who said that the only way for those groups to be saved is through the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is as though such officials tell terrorist groups to use chemical weapons against civilians, fabricate evidence, use fake witnesses and manipulate crime scenes, as they did previously, and such officials would provide those groups with media coverage and political support, and intervene to save them and then accuse the Syrian Government. That is what those States tell the

terrorist groups to do. Such theatrics are staged not only by the White Helmets; they are also staged here in the Council as part two of the Khan Shaykhun play directed by a permanent member of the Security Council.

Some members of the Council are in unprecedented denial although the majority of the members of this international organization agree that the conclusions of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) against the Syrian Government pertaining to Khan Shaykhun incident are false and unfounded. That did not prevent some States from repeating lies and unfounded accusations against my country. I would like to remind the Council that the JIM refused to visit Khan Shaykhun. It decided instead to rely on statements made by the criminals who perpetrated this immoral incident in Khan Shaykhun and on fake witnesses, presented and introduced by terrorists to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Joint Investigative Mechanism. The JIM also relied on so-called open sources, which proves that the comical investigation lacked minimum credibility and transparency.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly underscored before the Council and the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons that it condemns any use of chemical weapons or any other kind of weapons of mass destruction, which constitutes a crime against humanity and is an objectionable and immoral act that cannot be justified under any circumstances for any reason and regardless of where it takes place. We again stress that the Syrian army did not use any chemical weapons. It no longer possesses such weapons. In fact, the Syrian army itself and civilians have been the target of chemical weapons and toxins, including chlorine, used by armed terrorist groups. Such groups include the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Al-Nusra Front and associated entities. They have used chemical weapons in other places in Syria in terrorist crimes they committed in the country and the wider region. We have sent the Security Council and its specialized agencies more than 130 letters, with details about the possession, production and use of toxic chemicals by armed terrorist groups. Regrettably, the Syrian Government did not receive a response, not even one word on measures that the Council took against States that have helped terrorists to gain access to and use such weapons.

It is also deplorable that the Governments of some States have claimed to defend peoples and laws, while their political and colonial history is full of violations against them. How can the United States, the United Kingdom and France claim to be committed to justice when their track record is full of shameful attacks against people and wreaking annihilation in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Africa and, before that, in Viet Nam, Cambodia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada and many other States? With regard to the martyred city of Raqqa, an assessment mission conducted by the United Nations visited the city a few days ago and found that it has been completely destroyed by the attacks of the United States-led coalition against Raqqa and other parts of Syria. What credibility is it they talk about before the Council?

I would also like to refer to the so-called French initiative — the International Partnership against Impunity for Use of Chemical Weapons. It is an attempt to sidestep legitimate international mechanisms and to establish a politicized, parallel mechanism in order to serve the agendas of States that wish to accuse the Syrian Government at all costs. The partnership does not aim to prevent impunity, but rather to protect the real perpetrators who use chemical weapons.

Finally, the Syrian Government underscores that it is committed to implementing all the obligations it assumed when it joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, and will continue its war against terrorism regardless of any political or media blackmail and cheap exploitation of the blood of innocent people in Syria.

In conclusion, I would like to pose a question to the representative of the Netherlands. Why has the Netherlands not provided information so far about the chemical agents and technology found on the plane that crashed in Amsterdam in 1992? The explosion led to a giant orange glow, smoke and strange odour. Why has the Netherlands not provided information thus far on those chemical agents?

*The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.*